



# **Recovery High Schools Legislative Report**

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**This report is submitted pursuant to Chapter 71 of the Acts of 2009 which amended G.L. c.71, § 91.**

**May 2019**

**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**  
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This document was prepared by the  
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Commissioner

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Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner

May 6, 2019

Dear Members of the General Court:

I am pleased to submit this Report to the Legislature: *Recovery High School Programs Legislative Report*. As required by the statute, the enclosed report includes: “(a) the number of youths served per high school; (b) outcomes measured for youths; and (c) recommendations for new recovery high schools in the fiscal year 2020 and fiscal year 2021.” The data provided in this report was compiled from information submitted by schools to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department).

For adolescents in recovery from a substance use disorder, school is a setting that may result in interactions with peer groups who are actively using alcohol or other drugs. Unfortunately, after treatment, these students may encounter multiple risk factors when returning to the setting where their substance use problems originated. Recovery High School programs play an important role for these students by offering them another option in which they can feel supported in their recovery while still working towards a high school degree.

The Department takes seriously its increased role in supporting the Recovery High School programs, and we are grateful for the collaborative partnership efforts from our colleagues in the Department of Public Health.

If you have any questions about this report, please feel free to contact Samantha Graham, Substance Use Prevention and Intervention Specialist, in the Office of Student and Family Support via [samantha.graham@doe.mass.edu](mailto:samantha.graham@doe.mass.edu) or 781-338-6305.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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## Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) respectfully submits the Report to the Legislature: Recovery High Schools Legislative Report pursuant to [Chapter 71 Section 91](#) of Acts 2009, line item 7061-9607:

*For the administrative and programmatic costs of recovery high schools; provided, that the department of elementary and secondary education shall work collaboratively with the bureau of substance addiction services for the successful transition and continued operation of the recovery high schools model; and provided further, that the department of elementary and secondary education shall submit a report no later than April 1, 2019 to the house and senate committees on ways and means on: (a) the number of youths served per high school; (b) outcomes measured for the youths; and (c) recommendations for new recovery high schools in fiscal year 2021.*

Recovery High Schools are programs that provide a structured plan of recovery for students diagnosed with substance use disorder or dependency and offer the students a comprehensive four-year high school education. Recovery High Schools are not autonomous schools or school districts; they are public programs operated by a school district or an education collaborative. Recovery High Schools are educational options for students seeking support for recovery from addiction, combined with a comprehensive high school education.

Recovery High Schools were initially established in Massachusetts in 2006 through a grant program administered by the Department of Public Health (DPH), funded through state line item 4512-0211. In 2009, M.G.L. c. 71, § 91 was enacted to clarify several issues relating to these programs, including data reporting and fiscal responsibility. Under M.G.L. c. 71, § 91, Recovery High Schools receive the state average foundation budget per pupil for enrolled students from the students' districts of residence. An [advisory](#) was set forth to address special education service delivery for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) who are attending or planning to enroll in Recovery High School programs. This guidance supplements the regulations related to RHS programs, [603 CMR 54.00](#), which were adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in February 2017.

In July 2018, oversight for the Recovery High Schools was transferred from DPH to the Department, as directed by the Governor and Legislature through the 2019 state budget line item [7061-9607](#). The Department works closely with DPH to ensure the shift in transition of contract management and programmatic oversight.

There are currently five Recovery High Schools in Massachusetts:

- William J. Ostiguy High School opened in September 2006 in downtown Boston and is operated in partnership with the Boston Public Schools.
- Northshore Recovery High School opened in September 2007 in Beverly and is operated by Northshore Education Consortium.

- Liberty Preparatory opened in September 2007 in Springfield and is operated in partnership with the Springfield Public Schools.
- Independence Academy opened in September 2012 in Brockton and is operated in partnership with North River Collaborative.
- Rockdale Recovery High School opened in September 2015 in Worcester and is operated by Central Massachusetts Special Education Collaborative.

## The Number of Youths Served Per High School

Enrollment numbers vary among the five Recovery High School programs ranging from a low of 9 students at Liberty Preparatory School and a high of 30 students at Northshore Education Consortium. When comparing 2018 enrollment data at each program with their two previous years, there is some variability but the trend in enrollment remains fairly consistent. The following table includes the number of enrolled students from the October 2018 Student Information Management System (SIMS) for the five recovery high schools across the state.

	October 2018 Enrollment
Recovery High School	Students
Independence Academy	15
Liberty Preparatory School	9
Northshore Education Consortium	30
Rockdale Recovery High School	11
William J. Ostiguy High School	20

The table below includes the October 2018 SIMS by grade level, with 50 percent of the students being identified as 12<sup>th</sup> graders.

	October 2018 Enrollment			
Recovery High School	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Independence Academy	0	3	2	10
Liberty Preparatory School	3	2	3	1
Northshore Education Consortium	0	8	9	13
Rockdale Recovery High School	1	0	5	5
William J. Ostiguy High School	0	3	4	13

## Outcomes Measured for Youths

Recovery High School programs serve a complex population where students can earn a high school diploma and are supported in their recovery from drug and alcohol use. Along with the inherent issue of dealing with a student body that has been diagnosed with a substance use disorder, these programs also have the challenge of serving students who are at a significantly higher percentage than the state average of students with disabilities and who are considered economically disadvantaged in our [student information management system](#).

	Recovery High Schools	Massachusetts School Districts (Average)
Economically Disadvantaged	65.9%	31.2%
Students with Disabilities	36.5%	18.1%

Many of these students have experienced a gap in their academic career because of time spent in treatment or missing school due to a substance use disorder and/or mental health crises. They are at risk of dropping out of high school or falling severely behind in their academics. Dropping out of high school can be associated with negative socioeconomic and health outcomes. Recovery High School programs offer supports to these students and their families to meet each student's needs and help them reach success in their academic and personal lives. Of the non-twelfth grade students who were enrolled in the Recovery High School programs in the 2017/2018 academic school year, 97 percent continued to reach their educational goals by remaining enrolled in a Massachusetts' school the following academic year in October 2018.

While it can be a challenge to measure the effects a Recovery High School program has on achieving successful outcomes for their students, the Department recently hired a vendor to conduct an evaluation of these programs. The planned research will focus on analyzing and describing the educational and therapeutic models utilized by each of the schools as well as the extent to which the programs are having an impact on their students in the areas of education, substance use/misuse, and social and emotional outcomes.

## **Recommendations for New Recovery High Schools in Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021**

The Department is currently in discussions with school districts, Recovery High School programs, DPH, and other partners to determine how, collectively, to best meet the needs of students with substance use disorders. At this time, a new Recovery High School is not recommended as the Department continues to evaluate these programs.